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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000488

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - EU TROIKA FM'S BRING THE SAME OLD EU
MESSAGE

Classified By: DCM Judith Cefkin for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NOFORN) SUMMARY: We have spoken with EU diplomats to assess whether the "EU Troika" foreign ministers broke new ground when they visited Sarajevo on April 7-9. Although the simultaneous visit of Czech Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, French Foreign Minister Kouchner and Swedish Foreign Minister Bildt signaled the EU's growing concern about Bosnia, the ministers did not appear to bring with them a new approach or significant new messages. Bosnian politicians they met--Presidency members as a group and "Prud Process" party leaders as a group--appear to have been on their best behavior, with even Republika Srpska Prime Minister (RS PM) Dodik and Bosnian tri-Presidency member Silajdzic striking conciliatory notes. However, repetition of the old EU messages by the foreign ministers is unlikely to change the parameters of the broader political debate or help the Bosnians make political progress. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C/NOFORN) Tobias Axerup, Political Counselor of the Swedish Embassy, told us that the foreign ministers focused on three main issues: visa liberalization, fulfillment of conditions for closing the Office of High Representative (OHR), and constitutional reform. According to Axerup, there were few, if any, differences in the messages of the three ministers. They said the EU is concerned about developments in Bosnia and prepared to help, but Bosnian politicians must make the appropriate compromises and decide how to structure their country to meet EU requirements.

Visa Liberalization

¶3. (C/NOFORN) According to Axerup and Czech DCM Irena Gotzova, the ministers rejected appeals from Bosnian politicians to consider all Balkan countries as a bloc for visa-free status with the EU. They said Bosnia was falling behind its neighbors and that each country would be considered on its merits. According to Axerup, the ministers did not get into the details of where Bosnia was failing to fulfill its visa liberalization roadmap. They also did not address the issue of whether RS politicians were slowing adoption of some measures required for visa liberalization as part of a broader RS strategy of blocking the creation of effective state-level institutions. The ministers, he said, kept the talk at a general level about the need for politicians to make compromises in order to pass the necessary legislation.

OHR Closure

¶4. (C/NOFORN) Axerup and Gotzova said the Prud politicians

and members of the Presidency presented predictable talking points about the closing of OHR, with Bosnian Serb politicians such as RS PM Dodik and Presidency chairman Radmanovic arguing for quick closure while Bosniaks and Croats said that OHR should stay until Bosnia had more functional institutions. The EU foreign ministers urged the politicians to complete agreements on state and defense property so that Bosnia could meet the "5 plus 2" conditions and transition to an international presence led by the EU Special Representative (EUSR) by the end of this year.

According to Gotzova, the foreign ministers stressed that Bosnia could not obtain EU candidate status until OHR had closed. Bosniak President of the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) Sulejman Tihic and President of the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ-BiH) Dragan Covic, she said, argued for closing OHR by the end of this year so Bosnia could obtain candidate status, but said the constitution should be changed in 2009 before OHR closed. (Comment: support for closing OHR this year appears to be a new position for Tihic and Covic, though it was heavily caveated by the need for constitutional reform before taking this step. End comment)

¶5. (C/NOFORN) RS PM Dodik, Gotzova said, was conciliatory throughout the entire discussion and said he was "ready" to solve the issue of state property. Bosniak tri-Presidency member Silajdzic, she added, was also remarkably subdued, and frequently repeated that his party would immediately support any legislation necessary to meet EU requirements. Tihic argued that an activist EUSR would be essential after OHR closed. According to Axerup, Tihic said that Bosnian politicians could go 80 percent of the way to arriving at compromises on difficult issues, but they would need a strong

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EUSR to provide the last push to achieve agreement. Axerup said the foreign ministers did not discuss in any detail the "enhanced toolbox" to be used by the EUSR.

Constitutional Reform

¶6. (C/NOFORN) Constitutional reform was also an important topic of discussion, but the foreign ministers did not veer from the traditional EU approach to this issue. According to Gotzova, they said Bosnia needs a more efficient government in order to get into the EU, but the EU will not dictate what constitutional changes, if any, are necessary to achieve greater efficiency. However, according to Gotzova, one of the ministers did say that such EU requirements as the need to have one agricultural institution to interact with the EU might serve as a "frame" for possible constitutional changes.

¶7. (C/NOFORN) Foreign Minister Bildt, according to Axerup, stressed that the current two entity structure of Bosnia would be around for a long time to come. At a press conference after the discussions French Foreign Minister Kouchner reportedly said that Bosnians "are not ready for constitutional changes or some large institutional changes." He went on to say that joining the EU could slowly unite the Bosnian people and that the entire Western Balkans needs to join the EU. Then he added, puzzlingly, "After that we will see if they want to be together or they want to create some mini-federation. I do not know that. But they will be partners within the EU, member states."

Other Meetings

¶8. (C/NOFORN) Axerup noted that FM Bildt came a day before the official Troika visit and met with Prime Minister Spiric, Foreign Minister Alkalaj, Reis Cerić, and SDA Deputy Chairman Bakir Izetbegovic. He characterized many of the meetings as "semi-private" between Bildt and old friends from his time as High Representative in the 1990s. Axerup said these meetings did not break any new ground and, in any case, he did not

discuss details of the meetings. Gotzova noted that the Troika Ministers met with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) after they met with the Presidency and the Prud leaders in order to show their support for this institution which is promoting regional development in Southeast Europe. She added that FMs Schwarzenberg and Kouchner met the following day with Prime Minister Spiric, with a large group of Parliamentarians, and with a group of NGO leaders. Again she said that these meetings did not break new ground and she did not pass on details.

Comment

¶9. (C/NOFORN) The visit of the Troika Foreign Ministers was another sign that the EU is raising the profile of Bosnia and increasing its pressure on Bosnian politicians to make compromises. However, although the ministers stressed the need for Bosnian politicians to take concrete actions, the ministers apparently were unwilling to establish clearer guidelines for what state-level institutions must be strengthened in order to meet the functionality requirements of the EU. Since Bosnian politicians have been unable to agree on any kind of common vision on this issue, repetition of the old EU message appears unlikely to significantly help the Bosnians make political progress. Moreover, the reported comments of FM Kouchner, though they have not attracted further attention from Bosnian politicians, suggest that the ministers were unable even to send an unambiguous message that all Bosnians must work together in the same state for the indefinite future.

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